Maneater: The Survivor

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Maneater: The Survivor

by RedFive

Summary

COMPLETED: When work brings Chief Brody up to Baltimore for a weekend, she checks in on her good friend Will Graham, and although Will seems physically recovered from the events that occurred last spring, something is troubling him. Worried for her friend, she turns to Doctor Lecter for advice unaware of the danger she's in as the FBI closes in on their own maneater. One or all will be caught in their fishing nets, and not everyone will make it out alive.

Notes

Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the water...I'm baaaaaaaack.

I know that I originally said I had no intention of returning to the Maneater-verse (although I confess, there exists a short outline for two more timestamps that I might be persuaded to do one day) but when the Cre-ate-ive announced it's #LightsCameraMurder event, how could I resist?

If you're a new reader, do not, I repeat: DO NOT read this before reading Maneater as it will spoil the ending. But I hope you will check out the original because Maneater is a fic that is near and dear to me for many reasons.

Chapter one was beta'ed by @wolftrapqueen27 who also held my hand through all of Maneater. <3

See the end of the work for more notes

Reunions

There is nothing abnormal about a man of average height and build in khaki slacks and a plaid shirt in desperate need of an ironing. Handsome as he might be by typical standards, it wasn't even his looks that caught the eye. No, it was the oppressive aura of melancholy around him, which had only grown in size and malice since the last time Chief Brody had seen him. It was funny. For as much care as Will took to blend in and avoid social interaction, he drew attention naturally. He walked with a hurricane at his back, and he wasn't even aware of it.

'Someone should tell him,' Brody thought. Surely Doctor Lecter already had. Or one of his friends. Did he have friends? There was a girl, Abigail, she thought her name was. Will had mentioned her occasionally while they waited for their maneater to take the bait, but Brody had never figured out what Abigail meant to Will. Family? Friend? Will seemed uncertain himself sometimes.

The first time he had mentioned her to Brody, she thought Abigail had been someone he met through a case, but dismissed that assumption later as her knowledge of Will's interior life had grown. He obviously cared too much about the girl for her to be work. Family then. Someone removed, but close enough that he felt compelled to protect her. A cousin perhaps?

Brody hadn't wanted to pry too deeply. She and Will were not friends although not for lack of trying. As terrifying as the hunt had been, she enjoyed her time with Doctor Lecter and Will, so when her job brought her to Baltimore for a law enforcement seminar, she looked him up and pestered him till he agreed to take a break from his caseload.

"Will!" Brody called to him from ten yards, and waved her hand in the air unnecessarily. Will had obviously spotted her already or he would not be walking toward her now.

"Good to see you, buddy!" She said and clapped him on the shoulder when he was within reach.

"Kind of you to say, Chief Brody," Will said and surprised her with a hug. It was a short, quick hug. The kind of hug shared by casual friends rather than close intimates, but it was uncharacteristically warm and open for the shy special agent. It was also a relief. To have seen Will when he got off the boat after his confrontation with Michelle Hendrix, was to have seen the living dead. Michelle had attacked him and Doctor Lecter, and Will had killed her. The official report called it self-defense, although by the time the coroners rescued Michelle's body from the shark, who was to say otherwise? Brody had her doubts.

Not to say that Will had killed her in cold-blood. Michelle had kidnapped him. He had every right and cause to defend himself. and Michelle had been...well, Michelle had been evil, to put it simply. But something had happened out there, something that was not above board. She could see it in Will's eyes even now. Something had been done to him, and no one would tell her what.

Not Will.

Not Doctor Lecter.

And certainly not the forensics evidence. The sharks had eaten everything of value and returned with their secrets to the deep.

“Kind of me to say?” Brody said adopting a posh accent that was more British than Lithuanian, but what the hell. Accents, with her drawl, were never right. She'd accepted that long ago and appreciated the comedy in it. “Someone's gotten all fancy since we saw each other last. Guess you’re still with that swank boyfriend of yours.”

Will blushed and scratched at the scruff on his cheeks trying to mask the rose-colored bloom on his face. “Yes. We’re...together.”

‘Whoo-Hoo!’ She almost shouted. At least some things were going right for the poor man. And good, he deserved it! Will was a hero although he'd be the last to admit it.

Will and the Doc, what a pair. It had taken Brody a little while to figure it out, but once she did, she was all for it. They were meant for each other, a matched set of contrary lives and natures—like salt and pepper shakers. Everyone could see it, everyone but Michelle Hendrix. In hindsight, Brody recalled the many times she'd witnessed the former county coroner throw herself at Doctor Lecter with morbid amusement. And then, to be rejected with such dire finality...well, it served her right; psychotic bitch. Some good men and women had been hurt by her. Friends. Neighbors. Brody hoped that wherever Michelle was she was suffering, and she hoped too that it had hurt on the way down.

“How is the Doc these days?” Brody asked in such a light and convivial tone that no one could have guessed at the dark thoughts swimming in her mind.

“Fine. Never been better,” Will said with a slight curl of his lip that did not suggest domestic bliss. And yet, it could not be said that Will didn’t look better than the last time they’d spoken. His body had filled out, no doubt a result of Doctor Lecter’s marvelous cooking. He didn’t shake or seem as nervous. Didn’t stink of sweat and fever. If not for his pallor, which looked blue and corpse-like under the aquarium lighting, he looked like the picture of health.

“He's moving though, starting over somewhere else, and he wants me to go with him. He wants to make it permanent,” Will said sounding miserable.

“He proposed!?!” This was HUGE! “Congratulations! How did he do it!? Tell me everything!” She bet it had been overwrought and embarrassing for poor Will, a committed introvert and bachelor. No way a man like Hannibal Lecter did the deed without a full audience and string ensemble.

Will shook his head. “I'll spare you the gory details. Trust me, it's better that way.”

“It was a grand gesture?” She persisted. Will had to give her something. She lived for these soapy Hallmark dramas.

Will laughed but not happily. It was a peculiar sound reminding her of Quint in the most uncanny way. “It was a series of grand gestures on a scale not seen since the Renaissance.”

“I bet you hated that,” she teased and elbowed him in the stomach.

Will grabbed his guts and made a passable attempt at drama. “Every moment of it,” he said contradicting his playful posturing with a frown as deep as the Marianas Trench.

“Then why say yes?”

Will sobered. “I haven't given him my answer,” he said and lead them towards the ticketing counter. He flashed his badge at the front desk and was told to put his wallet away.

“They know me. There was a Ripper murder here over the summer. I was one of the first responders,” he explained.

They knew him alright. At the corners of her eyes, Brody saw the whisper line pass the news of their arrival to a mixed reception. Some seemed excited, more were nervous. Will must have done one of his little profiling shows at the crime scene in full view of the staff. That could have easily gone badly.

In her eyes, a cop’s eyes, what Will did was nothing short of remarkable. His mind alone was more useful and sharp than an entire team of investigators. But it creeped normal folk out, folk who didn't lay awake at night dreaming of dead bodies or the sad faces of parents mourning their children.

“Why were you with the first responders? Aren't the Feds always the last to arrive on the scene.”

“Technically that's the crime scene cleaners.”

Brody swatted him. “You know what I mean. Don't be so salty.”

Will waited to answer until a group of children passed by and moved out of earshot. “He...called me, or rather, he calls me now.”

“You’ve spoken to him!?” Brody was shocked! She looked around worried that someone else might be eavesdropping. This was salacious news! No one was reporting this, and for good reason! It made Will ***part*** of the investigation in an inseparable way and a target for the celebrity that clung to the Ripper mythos like a sweet perfume.

“Not exactly. He uses coded messages, often via proxy. It's all very cloak and dagger and unnecessarily dramatic, but I know him now through the game. I know how he thinks, how he plans. I always know when another body has dropped even without the specifics, and I can usually divine a location from the breadcrumbs he leaves me. The murder here for instance; it happened on the two-month anniversary of the day I shot Dr. Hendrix. He sent newspaper clippings in advance. Then all my fishing gear went missing. I knew I'd find it all here.”

Brody remembered the aquarium case and suddenly realized that the victim, a blonde woman who was kidnapped from a tennis court near Richmond, must have been emblematic of

Michelle Hendrix in the Ripper's tableau. "Why does he do it?"

"He wants me to be the first to know. Wants me to understand that he did it for me. He's kinda my biggest fan," Will laughed again and it was the same as before. There was no mirth in his voice, only a metallic rattle.

"He sounds like…," she stopped.

Will stopped laughing and looked at her helplessly. "Say it. Go on. I already know."

"It sounds like he has a crush on you," she spit out in a rush hoping to minimize the full scope and weight of such an awful admission.

"Worse. He's fallen in love with me," he said and rubbed the back of his neck in the same way her wife did when she had a tension headache.

'He's fallen in love with me.'

Brody didn't know what to say. How did you respond to a sentence like that? At least she didn't have to wonder about his and Dr. Lecter's troubles anymore. Watching your boyfriend be courted by a serial killer would put a strain on any relationship.

"What will you do?"

"Catch him. Bring him to justice...some other day." Will's demeanor changed again, and he relaxed back into his usual mild manners. "Come on, I promised to show you around. We're just depressing ourselves with all this Ripper nonsense."

They visited the stingray pool first. While Brody lived in a coastal town and not easily impressed, she would say this for the National Aquarium; it was breathtaking. The stingray pool lay at the center of an open atrium surrounded by several floors and cylindrical turrets that housed the other exhibits.

There was a petting pool for children so of course Brody dragged Will right over to the water's edge. The stingrays were friendly when they had food, and distant when their palms were empty. Typical.

"They're like dogs," Will grinned, "sea dogs."

Of course Will would think of dogs. He had actually gone and adopted Mayor Vaughn's three corgis after Vaughn was hauled off to jail for his involvement in the local drug trade. That had been a real surprise, finding out that Vaughn was the mysterious high roller to whom Quint owed money. A serial killer and a drug cartel in one season, yeesh. She had been grateful for a peaceful summer. Beach parties and potheads, the good life.

The same had not been true for Will.

After a silent spring in Baltimore while Will was down south, the Ripper had woken with a vengeance before Will had even unpacked. She'd followed all the cases online and texted Will when it felt appropriate. She wasn't a fed and barely more than an acquaintance so she

didn't know where her boundaries were. But it was impossible not to worry. The Ripper had been insatiable, at least one victim a week and sometimes two. Even the hostility of his violent crimes increased, as if his rage was on fucking viagra. It was horrible, and she meant that as a mostly private citizen. She couldn't imagine what the reality was like for the officers and agents that worked these cases.

And then there was the copycat…

He was new and shyer than his sire, and since he became active, the Ripper had experienced a cooling off period. His kills weren't nearly as brutal and they were fewer and farther between. Brody hoped that he was busy trying to hunt down the man or woman who was cutting into his limelight. Wouldn't it be great if they killed each other?

Meanwhile, she and Will had moved onto the octopus tanks.

"I think Hannibal owns a tie that looks ***exactly*** like that," Will said pointing to a little yellow octopus with blue spots.

"Says here it's one of the deadliest creatures in the world. One bite will kill you. Better not get too close," she warned.

"Appropriate," he said and rolled his eyes before walking away.

Will's sour mood returned with a vengeance when they reached the next tank. In this one, sat a large and dour looking grey beast. "It says this one ***ate*** his mate," he said and swallowed hard.

Wow, Will and the Doctor were going through some rough patch alright. "Will...is everything alright? Between you and the Doc."

"Who can say?" He shrugged. "I'm no longer sure who will eat who first."

Brody didn't want to say it, but she'd thought it would be Doctor Lecter in matters of domestic felicity. Will was good at his job, but bumbling with his feelings.

"Do you want to talk about it? I've been married for ten years. Maybe I could help?"

Will shook his head violently, as if there were a bee stuck in his curls. "No, no. Thank you for the offer, Chief Brody. You've done everything you could. I needed to get out of the house today before I saw him. Clear my head and all. Let's go look at the jellyfish. I've always found that exhibit cathartic."

"On one condition," she said crossing her arms and adopting a wide, intractable stance.

"What's that?"

"You never call me Chief Brody again. It's Margret."

"Fair enough...Margret."

After the jellyfish, there was only one thing left to see, and Will did not want to see the sharks. His reticence and anxiety were palpable as they entered the large central turret and began to descend down the stairs. He tried to be smooth about, but Brody didn't become sheriff for nothing.

“We don't have to,” she suggested, not needing to mention the word “shark” to make her meaning clear.

“No, I want to. It’ll be good for me with you here,” he said and flexed his dominant hand like he was shaking off a cramp or a phantom memory.

Truthfully, Brody hadn't wanted to see the sharks either. She had hoped she'd NEVER see another shark for as long as she lived and would have thought that Will and Doctor Lecter must feel the same way, so it surprised her when Will suggested the aquarium for their outing.

They kept it darker here than elsewhere and flooded the cramped space with a harsh blue light that made Will and Brody seem like aliens to each other. Around them, sharks of many shapes and sizes floated by, barely moving except for the faint undulations that kept their bodies in motion and oxygen rich water passing through their gills. Forward progress, it's what kept these brutes alive.

Forward progress. In that way, sharks were no different than people.

“They look so small,” she said as a little dusky shark swam past.

“Kittens by comparison, I know.” Will said and leaned closer to the clear wall to observe the little nurse shark that had taken an interest in them. “But the eyes are the same. They're ***always*** the same. Dead eyes. I should have seen it sooner.”

“Pardon?”

“Nothing,” Will said and flexed his hand again. When he caught Brody staring, he tucked his hands into his pockets and cleared his throat.

‘Lifeless eyes,’ Quint had said something almost exactly the same. *“You know the thing about a shark, he's got... lifeless eyes, black eyes, like a doll's eyes.”*

Brody repressed a shudder and pressed on.

One wall of the spiral staircase was clear glass so visitors could see the various species of sharks float by as they descended. It was an eerie feeling, walking down into the deep among the predators. Was this how Will felt at his job?

“Do you think sharks can be happy in a cage?” Will said looking over his shoulder as a large brown shark kept pace with them as if stalking its prey like a big cat on the savannahs.

Brody looked at the big shark and the cloudy sterile waters it called home, and she thought about Quint again and all the nights he'd spent in lockup singing until morning because he couldn't stand the sound of silence.

“No,” she said and wondered whether they were still talking about sharks or other creatures, like Quint...or the Ripper, who often found themselves in cages. “Some *animals* don't do so good in cages.” She emphasized the word “animal” because the Ripper was an animal, with no compassion or human sensibilities.

She believed that firmly...

...she wasn't sure Will did anymore.

Sudden movement took them both by surprise as the brown shark took off with a powerful thrust of its tail. The echoes of its passing bounced down the stairwell within concrete walls of the turret, a grand exit for a grand beast. Startled, Will jumped and smacked into Brody.

“Sorry!”’ he said.

“Little jumpy today,” she said and rubbed her shoulder.

“A little.”

Brody had a hard time letting Will’s inconsistent behavior go. She was a cop and naturally curious since birth. She was drawn to Will’s mysterious behavior like a shark is drawn to a drop of blood in the water. “So, what? Are you afraid of sharks now? I wouldn't blame you.”

“No, I'm afraid of the same thing I've always been afraid of; I'm afraid of the dark. Sharks just remind me that there are other, worse monsters in the blackness, ones I can't always see.”

“Like Michelle?” She asked.

The hand that was causing Will pain drifted to his sidearm and brushed the sleek handle of his gun. “Like Michelle..and the Ripper too.”

The Ripper. It always came back to him. “Your white whale and his copycat have kept you busy this summer. Is that what's got you bothered, Ahab?”

“Hah!” Will barked. “He's not a whale. He’s a great white if ever there were one.”

“And the copycat?”

Will paused and crossed behind Brody to stand in front of a large display illustrating all the different species of sharks by size in 3D relief. “I don't know,” he said somberly and began to trace the razed outline of the tiger shark with his fingertips. “I'm still figuring him out.”

“You’re sure it’s a man?” It was true that serial killers were often men, but as Michelle Hendrix had proved, men didn't have a monopoly on crazy.

“I'm sure. But nevermind about him, the copycat doesn't matter.”

That raised both her eyebrows. “Why not? They're both killers even if their victimology differs.” The copycat seemed to only kill men and women with violent pasts who had somehow escaped the legal system.

“He just doesn't," Will said sharply. "I can't explain it to you, part of the job, you understand? Sorry to pull rank.”

Brody clicked her tongue in annoyance. She hated to be shut out of the action, but the message was clear; this is as far as you go. Maybe he thought that if he caught one, the other would just fade away. Or he'd already caught the copycat. Will was a fed afterall. It was possible they already had the slimeball in custody, locked away in a secret underground bunker like they did in the movies.

Whatever the reason, it was clear Will was done with that line of conversation. His attention had moved on to the silhouette of the great white, which he picked at rather than traced with his fingertips.

Brody walked over to him, covering the ground in three steps, and placed a hand on his shoulder. “You did alright with your last maneater, which reminds me! I brought you something!” She said hoping that the trinket would lift the mood. She reached into her pocket and removed a large, white tooth taken from the very shark they had caught together. “I thought you'd like a trophy.”

Will flinched and took one step back like she had burned him with a hot iron. His melancholy was gone. His anger gone. Apprehension. Gone. Gone. Gone.

All Brody saw when she looked at her fellow peacekeeper was shock...and fear, a monumental amount of fear.

“A trophy? You thought I'd ***want*** a trophy?” He asked astounded.

“Will...are you okay? You’re worrying me,” she explained in a state of shock herself.

“Sorry. I'm sorry. It was just your phrasing.” Will regained his composure quick enough to incite suspicion and took the tooth out of Brody's hand before she could retract her arm. “Serial killers take trophies, I thought...never mind what I thought. It doesn’t matter.”

But Brody noticed that Will pocketed the tooth anyway.

What had Michelle done to him last spring? What had the Ripper done since? This was serious. Will had always been a bit odd, but morbidly fascinating and incredibly talented. Now, however, he was a man on the edge and unless someone intervened, he was going to push himself over the cliff.

“Will...do you remember what you promised me? You promised me that if things ever got so bad that you couldn’t separate yourself from the Ripper you would go to Doctor Lecter.”

Will reached into his shirt pocket and withdrew his glasses. The lenses looked dirtier than the first time she had seen him wear them, as if they hadn't been used in a while. “Yes, but why? What are you saying?” He asked as he flipped the frames over his his nose.

Brody drew a deep breath. It was better just to be out with it than bottle her concerns any longer. “You’re not a killer, Will. But it worries me that you think you are. It's time to go to

Doctor Lecter and tell him everything."

"Talk to Hannibal?"

"Yes! I think that I am familiar enough with you to know that you are going to ignore this problem until it swims up and bites you in the ass!"

With the glare of the aquarium lighting blotting out her view of Will's eyes behind his glasses, it was difficult to tell how he was taking the suggestion, and maybe that was the point. Will could be slippery when he had to be, like an eel.

"Yes, I suppose you're right. Sometimes when the fish aren't biting you've got to change the bait," he said cryptically. "I'll call him, but do you want to get a drink first? I feel like I've ruined our day being a grump. They sell beer at the cafe. There's a local pilsner that I like a lot called the Sea Dog."

"Quint would have loved that," though Will was more likely drawn to the canine connection. Why did she think of Quint so often when she was with Will?

"Cheers to swimmin' with bow-legged women," he said thickening his accent to bring authenticity to the performance. "Come on, for old time's sake, before I...before I go talk to Hannibal."

They'd spent all afternoon in the shadows and it was starting to wear on her mood. "I should really get going. I'm missing the sunlight."

He nodded looking like he had already expected the rejection. "I'll walk you out."

They hugged at the door, acknowledging the journey they'd taken today. "Goodbye, Will. Don't be a stranger. Look me up if you're ever down south again."

"I will," He said departing as a friend, not just a colleague. "Farewell, Margret."

As Will walked away, Brody could hear him singing a hauntingly familiar tune.

"Farewell and adieu to you Spanish Ladies. Farewell and adieu you ladies of Spain. For we've received orders for to sail back to Boston. And so nevermore shall we see you again."

The half-mad lilt of it made her blood run cold. The moment Will was out of earshot, she reached for her phone and dialed Hannibal Lecter.

Farewells

Chapter Summary

A dinner turns deadly when Chief Brody comes face-to-face with Will's maneater...and his copycat.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the slight delay. Got to feeling kinda crummy. Anyway, here's the final chapter. Thank you all for returning with me to this world! Hope you'll join me on future fishing trips.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Doctor Lecter received her call and promptly invited her over to dinner, which she was all too happy to accept. Brody remembered their meals onboard the *Jonah* , and still dreamed about them at night. So while it felt strange to be dining together without Will, she accepted the invitation eagerly and found herself seated at Hannibal Lecter's table a few hours later.

His house was exactly as she had imagined it would be: opulent, rich, and and as odd and eccentric as the man himself. The pile of skulls in the foyer and other examples of taxidermy decorating the adjacent rooms were somewhat surprising. She had been prepared for weirdness, a lot of creepy marble statues and what not, but this a step beyond that.

"I never stopped being a student of anatomy even after I left my practice," he explained as she peered into the empty eye sockets of a wolf's skull that sat on a bed of polished stones and leafy bunches of hemlock at the center of the table. "I hope you don't think me terribly morbid."

"I wouldn't say morbid," she said. But calling it "creepy as fuck" seemed unconscionably rude, and Will had always warned her how much Doctor hated rudeness. But at the end of the day, who was she to judge? This strange affection Doctor Lecter held for anatomy was probably just one more thing that made him a good match for her friend. Only someone with an iron stomach and a mind as strange as Doctor Lecter's could tolerate being with someone in Will's line of work.

Brody sipped the home brew Doctor Lecter had poured for her. According to him, it had been fermented in a barrel salvaged from a shipwreck, accounting for the subtle brininess of the ale. Brody thought the whole story sounded like bullshit, but if anyone was going to buy salvage with a fancy pedigree just to brew beer with it would be Doctor Lecter.

Other surprises awaited her in Doctor Lecter's home. A pair of muddy boots stood guard beside the umbrella stand. A can of instant coffee kept company with the tea chest in the kitchen. Doctor Lecter seemed as happy to display these small sign's of Will presence in his space as he was with his taxidermy collection. It was ridiculously cute if a little upsetting given the state she'd left Will in earlier. Will did not seem nearly as happy and confident in their relationship as Doctor Lecter clearly did.

It made Brody hesitate. Should she have involved herself at all? What if she made it worse between them?

'*Sometimes when the fish aren't biting you've got to change the bait,'* Will's words tugged at her detective's mind again. No, she had to come. Something was wrong. And if someone didn't stop him, she worried Will was about to do something very stupid if he hadn't already.

"So how have you been, Doc? And I'm not talking about the usual pleasantries. How have you been *really* ." She asked when they finally sat down to dinner.

"Never better," he said only barely wincing in response to the abbreviated honorific he hated so much.

By all appearances it was true though. The summer had been far kinder to him than to Will. He had a glow about him and a flounce in his step like a man deeply in love. He was also back in his full regalia of waistcoats and silk ties looking more comfortable than she'd ever seen him in Georgia. No more bucket hats for him. Here was Hannibal Lecter in his natural habitat. He seemed happy. He seemed at peace.

Brody thought he had invited her over, insisting that it be tonight, because he was worried about Will too. But to her surprise, he danced around the subject of Will's mental health refusing to believe anything was amiss.

"You might want to get your eyes checked, Doc. Love's made you blind," she said finishing the first course, a plate of crostini topped with iron rich organ meat and olives. "He looks like death warmed over."

"Appearances can be deceiving, Chief Brody. Judge not a book by its cover nor a man," he winked as he cleared the plates. "Will is fine and stronger than he's ever been. Surely you must agree that he was far worse off when he was so often taken by those fevers last spring. The worries that trouble him now will soon be resolved. He is making such remarkable progress in therapy."

Doctor Lecter was right about one thing, Will had looked dreadful then, but he hadn't frightened her like he did now. Will's former spells took him away to some distant place in his imagination. What she had seen in the aquarium felt different, colder somehow.

"You're still his therapist? How does that work."

"It's unconventional, I grant you, but so is my patient."

Unbelievable. The FBI really was going to let this continue? The Ripper situation must be worse than she realized if they needed Doctor Lecter and Will this badly.

During the entrée, Doctor Lecter repeated his assurances that everything was fine, that the Ripper posed no immediate threat to either of them, and that Will was suffering from no more than a bit of sleeplessness due to the pressures of his work. He said it with such confidence and showmanship that Brody almost began to forget the specifics of why she'd come.

She was halfway through her second helping of roast beef when his phone went off.

Doctor Lecter blushed as he checked the number at the table. "Will. Pardon me, Chief Brody, I must take this," he said and excused himself.

His home was abnormally silent lacking even the natural creaks and groans of a house as it settles. She tried not to eavesdrop, but the quietude made that impossible.

"It isn't time," she heard Doctor Lecter say to Will over the phone from the next room over. Was it her imagination or did he seem alarmed?

There was a pause.

"You told them what!?"

Another pause.

"So that is your answer then?" he said and all but growled the words. "I….I must go, Will. *I have a guest to attend to, an old friend from out of town whom I believe you know."*

The man who returned to the dining room was much changed in demeanor and appearance. The energy was gone out of him like a spent candle, and his bangs, which had previously been swept back, now hung in his face as if a hand had been wrung through them in agitation.

Doctor Lecter plopped into his seat as graceless and tired as an old hog. "You must forgive me, Chief Brody. Love makes me rude," he said.

"It's okay. Is Will alright?"

"No, I don't think he is." Doctor Lecter stabbed the meat on the plate with his fork and expounded no further. Whatever Will had said had clearly upset him greatly.

"Should I go? I don't want to get in your way if you'd rather be alone."

Doctor Lecter's head snapped up. "No!" he said practically shouting, and then, more calmly. "No, please, don't let my sour mood spoil this meal. I will get over it. I always do, and it is a trifling thing between us."

An awkward silence entered room as they scratched at their meals with their utensils. Neither person knew what to say to the other.

In the end, Doctor Lecter cracked first asking if she would mind staring their earlier conversation over. “Tell me again *exactly* what Will said today at the aquarium and how he looked to you. *Leave nothing out* ,” he said. It wasn’t a command, not in the gentle way he spoke it, but it wasn’t NOT a command either.

Brody picked at a loose thread on her napkin trying to plan an escape from this conversation. She stopped when she caught glaring at her from across the table.

“I really don’t have anything else to say that you haven’t already heard before. Will seemed upset. I was hoping you knew why.”

Doctor Lecter picked up his glass of red wine and twirled it beneath his nose before responding. “On the contrary, Chief Brody. I think there is a lot more you can add to my current understanding of the situation.”

…

After dinner they retired to the kitchen because desert required Doctor Lecter’s full attention. He made Brody a cup of coffee then peeled two pears while melting some caramel on the stove. He seemed calmer after the rest of their conversation, and much more like himself.

The coffee he served her was a thick, black mixture that smelled of smoke and tasted like cinnamon, molasses, and copper. “What is this?” She asked breathing in the rich smell. It was unlike anything she’d ever tasted before.

“A special blend. I thought it up myself last spring.”

“It’s wonderful. Did you roast the beans yourself?”

“I always do,” he chirped in his usual high spirits. “I'm glad somone appreciates it. Will only drinks instant,” he admitted sourly.

“Do you want to talk about it? About what’s going on between you and Will? I don't mean to pry, but as a therapist, surely you would agree that talking helps.”

“Drink your coffee, Chief Brody. You don’t want it to get cold.”

She was trying to, but it was slow work. The coffee must be decaf because it was putting her out instead of waking her up. She should probably go home soon. Bed sounded heavenly right now.

Halfway through her glass, she started feeling dizzy. “Doctor Lecter, I don’t feel so well,” she said rising to her feet. “Where’s your restroom?”

“No, Chief Brody, I don’t expect you do.” Doctor Lecter placed his knife onto the counter and turned off the stove. “You should sit down before you lose consciousness. No sense cracking your head open before I get the chance to do it for you.”

His words did immediately register to Brody. It...it sounded like he was threatening her! “Excuse me?”

But Doctor Lecer ignored her question and kept his eyes pointed away from her when he spoke. “Do you know that most people get attacked by sharks in three feet of water about ten feet from the beach? Doesn’t that seem strange to you?”

“What are you talking about?”

Doctor Lecter removed his, apron, waistcoat, and tie. Free from the trappings of a scholar and socialite, she saw for the first time the telltale markings of a hard life. Broad shoulders. Rough hands. A wide stance, ready for battle. “People are always the most vulnerable when they think they safe,” he continued. “I deeply respect the shark for this lesson. They have been great mentors to me, and to Will too, I dare say, although he may not want to admit it.”

Brody tried to rise but fell backwards as soon as her weight settled onto her feet. He’d drugged her! That bitchass had drugged her! And whatever he had put in her coffee was acting fast. She had to get out.

Her head struck the countertop on her way to the floor. The blow caused her vision to go dark for a moment, and when she could see again, Doctor Lecter stood over her with a knife and his silk tie in his hands.

“Have you figured it out yet? Do you know who I am, Chief Brody?”

Oh, she knew. She had seen enough sharks to recognize them at this distance. This was Will’s maneater.

“The Ripper,” she mouthed because she longer had the energy for speech. Brody wasn’t sure whether he had poisoned her or merely sedated her, but if Doctor Lecter really was the Ripper, she better hope for the quick death.

…

There was a thick smell of iron in the air when Brody came to. For a moment, she thought she was back onboard the *Jonah* sloughing chum into the waters of the Georgian coast.

But when her mind cleared, she saw that she was in an immaculately stocked pantry. There was blood of her face and shoulders from a deep laceration across her forehead, and for the moment, she was alone.

Well this was a fine mess she had gotten herself into. So Doctor Lecter was the Chesapeake Ripper...great. *‘Do no harm, my ass.’*

Brody lay on the floor on her side. Her hands were tied behind her back by a length of soft material. His tie perhaps? When she tried to stand another wave struck dizziness and forced her to take a break. It was clear Brody would go no further until the sedative wore off, but least she was sitting up now.

Why had Lecter done it in the first place? She was still a cop after all and a high risk target. Taking her hostage or worse was a monumentally stupid move.

Unless he didn't plan to escape...

‘*Doesn't matter,’* she reminded herself. He'd be coming back as soon as he finished his preparations, and then she was shark bait. She wouldn't let herself think about the specifics of those plans. She couldn't! She would need all her wits to get out of this alive, but her wits were in short supply due to the lingering effects of the sedative.

‘Am I going to get out of this alive?’

“Bullshit,” she spat trying to snap out of it. Fatalist thinking never did anyone any good. She'd learned that in Iraq. She was going to get out of this pantry. She was going to get out of this house, and then Lecter was going to pay *for everything.*

There were noises outside, then a cry, and the loud, wet thump of a body crumpling to the floor.

Lecter or Will she imagined. Will was the only one who could be coming.

‘Please let it be Lecter,’ she prayed.

But speak of the devil and he shall appear. The door opened and it was Lecter’s body that filled the portal. He shut the door behind him and ignored Brody while he thumbed through the spice rack. He didn't *look* injured, but when he suddenly sagged against the rows of flour bags and spices and buried his face in his sleeve, her heart gave a little flutter of glee. Good job, Will! At least he hand landed a few good punches before he fell.

It wasn’t until she heard the muffled sob that she understood what was really happening.

Lecter was crying.

Will had given him his answer, and the answer was no.

‘But why would the Ripper be crying...oh, God, no.’

The pieces snapped together like the clip of a gun. Will’s misery at the aquarium. His hesitancy in his relationship. It all made sense. Will had known that Lecter was the Ripper, for how long she couldn’t say. But that wasn't the worst of it.

‘The copycat doesn’t matter,' Will had said, but of course the copycat mattered. The copycat, the Ripper’s dance partner...it had to have been someone close to him. Someone who knew how he thought and knew his crimes intimately enough to recreate them.

The copycat...*was Will.*

It made sense now: Will’s choice of victims, criminals who had escaped the justice system, and the effect every successful murder by the copycat had on the Ripper’s intensity. Lecter was in love with Will, and he had thought that the copycat’s actions was proof that Will loved him back. Every murder had been a coded message between them. *‘I know you. I see you. And I understand.’*

“Please, you don’t have to do this. Will loves you, I swear it,” she begged. She actually wasn't sure if Will really loved him or not. The man she'd met with this afternoon had seemed

conflicted on that point, but frankly she didn't care about the truth right now. She didn't think she could stomach any more of it today.

In any hostage system, it paid to humanize yourself and bond with your captor, and if the Ripper had a heart at all, love was the way to appeal to it. None of his previous victims had held this advantage. Perhaps she wasn't chum yet! "He'll come around if you explain it to him again. I'm sure of it! He just wasn't ready yet."

Lecter was silent, but he had stopped crying. Brody didn't know whether that was a good or bad sign, but he was listening to her at least. That had to count for something.

"I won't tell anyone. Please, take him and go."

"Go?" He asked and finally turned to face her. Blood soaked the front of his shirt, a lot of blood. "Go? With Will? Look at me. That's not possible anymore."

Brody looked, but not at his shirt. It was his eyes that held her attention, his black; impassive; lifeless eyes.... *like a doll's eyes.*

Unbidden one of Quints old fish tales floated to the surface of her mind, of a fishing accident he had survived.

"*We formed ourselves into tight groups. You know, it was kinda like old squares in the battle like you see in the calendar named "The Battle of Waterloo, and the idea was: shark comes to the nearest man, that man he starts poundin' and hollerin' and screamin' and sometimes the shark will go away…but sometimes the shark wouldn't go away.*

Sometimes that shark he looks right into ya. Right into your eyes. And the thing about a shark is he's got lifeless eyes. Black eyes. Like a doll's eyes. When he comes at ya, he doesn't even seem to be livin'… 'til he bites ya, and those black eyes roll over white and then… ah then you hear that terrible high-pitched screamin'. The ocean turns red, and despite all your poundin' and your hollerin' those sharks come in and… they rip you to pieces."

In his story, it hadn't ended well for most of the sailors aboard that vessel. Only Quint and a handful of others had escaped with their lives if not their sanity, but the lesson was clear: divert the shark's attention and make him less interested in you to the disadvantage of the next guy.

"Did you kill him?" Broday asked a;though she was afraid of the answer. Will was her diversion, and if he was dead so was she.

Lecter gave her a pained expression looking as if he had swallowed something sharp. "Why don't we go see?" he said and dragged her up to her feet.

In the kitchen, Will sat in a pool of his own blood, alive but in agony. He looked like a fish that had been gutted and prepped to be eaten, and maybe he was. Maybe they both were.

"You were supposed to go," Will said through clenched teeth. He looked at Lecter and then at Brody. His eyes held an apology, but she wasn't sure who it was meant for.

It was strange seeing Will like this. He was her friend, and now...he was a murderer too. He was also dying. But maybe he deserve to die? He had killed people for Christ's sake! And stood by while Lecter murdered more. *He was a killer, a serial killer.* TattleCrime had been right about him all along. Will wasn't a forensic genius, and he wasn't Superman either. He was a psychopath. Just a psychopath. And he had played them all for fools whether he realized it consciously or not.

"No, WE were supposed to go together, Will." Lecter growled. "Or do you not remember what you told me last week when I proposed my plan to you after we killed that dog fighter you were so fluffed about?"

Brody raised an eyebrow. They were killing as a team now? These sons of bitches...

Will caught Brody glaring at him and looked away in shame. "I didn't give you my answer, Hannibal."

"You said you enjoyed it. You called it beautiful! You lied. You lied...to me."

"I didn't," Will whispered and then to Brody, "God, help me, I didn't lie."

If Will was was expecting some sort absolution, he wasn't going to find it from either Brody or Lecter. She could see that Will was telling the truth, even if Lecter was too hurt to see it too, but the knowledge made her sick and furious. She didn't recognize the man bleeding to death at her feet. Her friend had been a tortured but virtuous soul, and Lecter had fed that man to the sharks.

"More lies! What was it all for, Will? Revenge? Revenge for what I did to you before I knew what we could be together? I didn't know!" Lecter was vibrating with anger like a live wire. Brody felt his grip slip as he laid into Will with his hurt feelings. Her chance was around the corner.

"But I never lied about my feelings for you, Will. *Never* . And this is how you return them? You'd have put me in a cage, taken away my freedom."

"No, no, no," Will mumbled, his voice growing fainter. "I gave it back. Told you to run. You were supposed to be gone by the time the FBI arrived."

"And leave without you, a clean break? What were *you* going to do, Will? Turn yourself in? How magnanimous of you," Lecter snarled.

'I'll show you a clean break,' Brody thought and slammed her head back into Lecter's face.

Lecter cursed in his native tongue as his nose broke, and he released his hold over Brody.

She ran but only made it five steps before her legs gave out. She fell knowing Lecter would be on her in a moment.

"Margret!" Will shouted. Something metallic skittered across the floor toward her, Will's sidearm.

She rolled into her back, reached for the gun, and fired.

Lecter was already in mid-pounce leaving her little time to aim. She hit him, but the bullet missed his heart and tore through his shoulder instead. It was not enough to stop him, just enough to to hurt. He fell on her howling like a mad dog.

They grappled, but he was stronger and high on adrenaline. Lecter ripped the gun from her hands and tossed it, far from either her or Will's reach. Then he grabbed her by the collar and slammed her head against the floor: once, twice, three time. She saw stars when he pulled her to her feet.

"You'll pay for that, *Margret,"* Lecter whispered emphasizing her name as if to suggest that he was annoyed that she and Will were on a first name basis.

"That's Chief Brody to you, asshole," she coughed out.

He huffed and reached for a knife from the block on the counter. He laid the blade against her throat and wrapped his other arm around her waist so she could not flee again.

"Hannibal...don't," Will begged.

"I let you know me. See me," Lecter said leaning over Brody's shoulder so she could not hit him in the nose again. "I gave you a rare gift, Will, but you didn't want it."

Will tried to laugh, but coughed up blood instead. "Didn't I? Didn't I though?"

Lecter began to rock, swaying like he and Brody were dance partners, and then, because God had a cruel sense of humor, he began to sing. "Farewell and adieu to you Spanish ladies. Farewell and adieu you ladies of Spain." Unlike Will's voice had been, his voice was smooth and even. There was no madness in it, and no emotion. It undulated like the deep swells of the ocean on those calm days that generally preceded a hurricane.

Brody struggled as Lecter slid the blade across her throat.

"NO!" Will screamed as her body dropped to the floor in a bloody heap.

Lecter tossed the knife towards Will, daring his star-crossed lover to defy him again. But the knife fell just outside Will's reach and with it, Brody's last hope of taking Lecter to hell with her.

Lecter, meanwhile, resumed his song as Brody fought for air that wouldn't come, like a fish out of water.

"For we've received orders to sail for Boston, and we may never see you fair ladies again..."

Chapter End Notes

Dun..dun...DUUUUUUUUN! I know that's a terribad place to leave y'all, and it will be sometime before I can return to the Maneater-verse so I wanted to leave you with a few headcanons to think on until then.

For those worried about Will: he's alive and recovering.

Brody: Not so much. But! Good news! You haven't seen the last of the indomitable Chief Brody! I invite you to imagine a season three where's it's Brody's ghost following Will around Italian acting as Will's moral compass and pushing for revenge while Will deals with the emotional and physical fallout of Hannibal blowing up all their lives.

Even Better News!: ABIGAIL IS ALIVE! And Hannibal, determined to spite Will by carrying out his plan to start over in a new land and be happy, is doing the best he can as her super awesome Murder Dad. They have a house on the Italian coast where he mopes around a lot and looks at sunsets. It's kinda sad but super adorable. There is a dog. Meanwhile, Abigail has been secretly keeping an eye on Will via the internet while she struggles to decide whether to help or hinder the inevitable reunion.

Here are the links to Maneater on Tumblr and to Maneater: The Survivor on Tumblr and Twitter if you would like to help boost the signal. Thank you again for your kudos, comments, and reblogs! Your enthusiasm makes returning to past projects delightful. Until next time!

Fun Fact #1: The coffee recipe is the one that Hannibal conceptualized in Chapter 1 of Maneater when he killed Christine Watkins.

Fun Fact #2: The Survivor was one of the rejected titles for the novel Jaws and refers to Chief Brody (being the only character to survive the novel).

Fun Fact #3: I am a terrible person with a terrible sense of humor. I submit Fun Fact #2 as evidence. ;-)

End Notes

Final chapter coming this weekend. For those who caught it, the blue-ringed octopus is not the same cannibalistic mini-tyrant from Down Where It's Wetter, not exactly. But if there are many possible worlds and futures as Will suggests in Season 3, why not another blue-ringed octopus!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!